The Shooting Times and Country Magazine—November 18, 1955

EXPERIMENT WITH PARTRIDGES

by David Cobham

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

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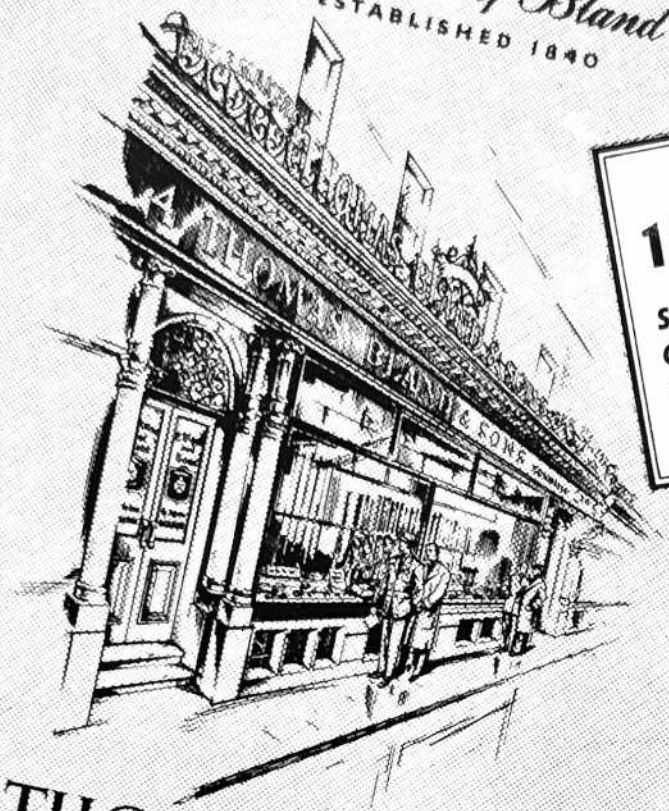

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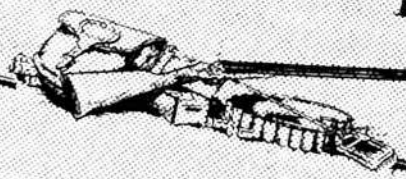

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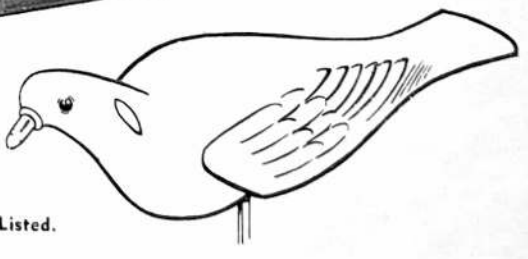

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

THE shooting lunch comes into the picture at this covert-shooting period, perhaps more vividly for one or two good reasons. Indeed it may even assume some semblance of a function—depending on circumstances and occasions. It is withal a pleasant break in what is usually a rather hurried day.

Lunch on the moors always possesses something of a picnic flavour; lunch at partridge shoots, when a summer sun is still shining, is often an affair more of thirst than of hunger; but lunch in the home coverts (or more accurately often in some convenient farm building) is frequently a more substantial affair—certainly it has a character all its own. The only handicap lies in the fact that it must necessarily be consumed in a short space of time. And certainly in those far away pre-war days, when life generally was an easier and more leisurely affair, ambitious repasts were by no means the exception — ranging from champagne and caviar to beer and bread and cheese.

However, now that house parties and domestic activities are on a far more modest scale, the members of a shooting party may have to rely on the lunch for their discussions rather than on evening dinner (by which time they will be dispersed). So, short though the meal will necessarily be, much ground may need to be covered. And it usually suits all parties if consumption is made as simple as possible, commensurate with physical requirements. Hot or extravagant meals of any kind are surely out of fashion.

But it is all important that the 30 or 40 minutes allowed during the short November afternoons may not be wasted. There is so much to be said, so many *post mortems* to be conducted, future plans and introductions to be made. Many a man settling in a new locality owes his shooting invitations to discussion at luncheon.

To all those who are one-hundred-percent. shooting men it is therefore a little sickening if conversation turns to extraneous subjects. Here is an occasion for talking "shop" which should bore *nobody* for once. Perhaps most of all should these interludes be seized upon by the younger generation of shooters who will enjoy unrivalled opportunities to come to close quarters with elder and more experienced sportsmen, from whom they can learn and pick up tips. It is the wise man who *listens* on these occasions—it is the fool who "rushes in."

Thus, over sandwiches, cheese and beer (or whatever the stewards have seen fit to prepare) conversation will range from the particular events of the day to general tactics, preservation, dogs, guns, shot-sizes and all the rest. For obvious reasons it is better to eschew discussion of the merits (or demerits) of keepers and leave such personal matters to another time and place. There will be no lack of other topics to outlast the short time allowed.

Shooting lunches cannot always be enjoyed of course under such favourable conditions. A damp, windy day and the shelter at best of a haystack are not nearly so conducive to informal discussion !

* * *

AMERICAN SURVIVALS

News comes this month of the migration of the world's few surviving whooping cranes from their nesting area in north-west Canada to their winter resort in the wild life sanctuary at Matagorda in Texas. Last year 21 birds without young accomplished the journey. This year only 13 birds have so far reached Texas, but this figure includes four young cranes. For the first time for more than 30 years officials of the Canadian wild life service have located their breeding ground, where they counted about 25 birds including six young. The migration does not necessarily take place *en masse*, and it is hoped that the remainder, about half the total flock, will yet reach Texas. The musk ox disappeared from Alaska about 100 years ago. It could then be found in a wild state only in Greenland and even there numbers were steadily diminishing. In 1935 thirty-one musk oxen from Greenland were established in Alaska, and the Director of the Interior announces that the herd now numbers 116.

A YEAR'S PROGRESS

The annual meeting and dinner of the St. Hubert Club of England was held at the Club Headquarters, 49 Hallam Street, London, this month, with Dr. G. G. Exner in the Chair. Fifty-five members attended the dinner. The menu included turtle soup, mushroom atlas, grouse a la St. Hubert, Praline Surprise with a 1949 Chablis and an excellent 1949 St. Emilion, topping up with St. Hubert port. At precisely the same time, the annual meeting and dinner of the St. Hubert Club of Ireland was held in the Hibernian Hotel, Dublin and toasts between the Irish and English Clubs were exchanged by telephone. During the course of the evening, Dr. Exner presented the Gold Medal of Merit of the Order of St. Hubert to Baron Adam Konopka who was responsible for founding the Club in England, and, during the past two years, has given himself heart and soul, not only to the welfare of the St. Hubert Club, but to building up sporting facilities for the members. He was responsible for helping to organise the Wild Life Exhibition in London, and the exhibits at the Dusseldorf Exhibition, and has gone out of his way to study the best means of improving the status and future of gamekeepers, as well as taking a close, and, often critical interest in the trends of modern legislation as they affect sport and wild life. The only other holder of the medal in this country is the Earl of Mount Charles.

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHS

The number of entries of natural history photographs to the Royal Photographic Society's exhibition has risen in recent years to such an extent that the subject now has its own exhibition. The excellent collection of photographs can be seen in London at 16 Princes Gate until November 30, after which date it will be moved to the Hancock Museum in Newcastle. Birds, mammals, fish, insects, trees and flowers are all represented. A small proportion of the exhibits were taken with very special cameras, but the majority are the result of normal equipment. A telescopic lens is now normal equipment to the animal photographer, and this coupled with the very fast films now available account for some extraordinarily interesting action photographs of British mammals.

PROCESSED BAIT

An increasing world demand for food and the inability of the inhabitants of most parts of it to live on their own products has brought about a mighty traffic in concentrated and processed foods. Human beings, dogs, cats, birds and all the stock on a farm are now partially fed with processed foods most of which were unknown thirty years ago. So far fish in the wild state have escaped. The Marine Biological Association of Great Britain has for the past twelve months experimented with artificial baits, and the result is a mixture of seaweed and fish designed for use as bait in crab and lobster pots when the normal fresh fish bait cannot be obtained. It is now to undergo field trials. If it proves successful the possibilities seem endless.

GUN AT THE TRAIL

It is especially sad to relate that a boy of two has been killed by an accidental discharge of a gun carried by his grandfather. The boy was Ian Ronald Kelly, of Widnes, Lancashire. The grandfather, William Alfred Hale, also of Widnes, said he, his wife, their young son, and Ian went for a walk near Ruthin. He was holding the gun at the trail with the barrel pointing away from the boys. Suddenly he felt a hand touch the butt of the gun and heard a little boy's voice saying: "Is this your gun, Grandad ?" As he was turning slightly both barrels went off, and he saw Ian falling.

THE ARCHERS

Leading Aircraftsmen Louis Henry Tyree, John William Crocker and Ian M. Pankhurst, all regulars, stationed at Uphaven, Wiltshire, R.A.F. station were each fined £3 10s. with £1 1s. costs by Pewsey magistrates last week for trespassing and shooting six pheasants. The Aircraftsmen had set out on their foray with bows and arrows, but stated that they did not go out with the object of shooting pheasants, but intended to shoot at other kinds of targets.

THE SNO-CAT

On first seeing the word sno-cat we thought of snow leopards and other felines of high altitudes. The sno-cat proves to be a cabin mounted on four independent tracks, an American invention which travels over snow. Four of these are to be used in the forthcoming Trans-Antarctic expedition.

A mud gutter may be firm, or you may sink in knee-deep. An hour or so of negotiating such hazards is guaranteed to tire the most tireless.

Ere Going Up To Roost

by Tower-Bird

THE two articles I wrote last month, entitled "Wildfowling Misery?" plus a recent experience, remind me that Near-Misery and Wonderful Relief may be firmly wedded. I refer to those comparatively rare occasions when the fowler returns home at midnight, or in the early hours, completely "done up"—asleep on his two flat feet—but must first of all face several jobs-of-work before finally going up to roost in a state of semi-consciousness.

During a recent occasion, I had cause to go without sleep (except for nodding off for a few minutes at odd intervals) for two nights. On the day following those two nights I returned from work knowing that my fowling partner would be calling for me at 4.15 a.m. sharp, and that, because of certain matters to be attended to, I should be lucky if I could steal five hours' sleep. Maybe I was a little overtired, or maybe I was plotting and planning for the morrow's foray. At all events, I did with considerably less than five hours' sleep, and, what little I did get was disturbed by vivid "dreams" of tides, moons and exact schedules. However, since I am one of those individuals who for donkey's years has trained himself to require little sleep, I woke up sharp at 3.15 a.m. and felt as lively as a cricket by the time my partner pulled up outside my door, his grey rattle-trap lit by the golden light of a three-quarters moon.

Satisfactory Flight

By the time we arrived at the coast, however, it was raining hard, and the steady downpour lasted for four hours, during which period we hugged the sea-wall and enjoyed a flight far and away better than anything we had expected. For the rest of the day, we were able to enjoy the odd shot, although evening flight proved to be a shot-less failure. When it became too dark to see to shoot, even had there been anything to shoot at, we packed up by the light of electric torches and then made a cross-country run of some eight miles to an inn where, that evening, we were attending a meeting. We timed our arrival at the inn for 6 o'clock, for we were both parched (personally, I was seized up!), having had nothing stronger to drink than a thermos of coffee since 4 a.m. that morning.

But what was this? The inn was closed and there was a notice on the front door. "Tonight we are not opening till 7 o'clock. Please come round to the garden behind the house and enjoy our fireworks display." So, after the fireworks of the day, we enjoyed another display, and, to cut a long story short, we arrived back almost at my cottage after midnight, having driven some twenty-five miles through a very nasty dose of fog.

Unexpected Floods

Now, I say that we "almost" arrived at my cottage. As we approached the entrance to the village, we noted with surprise that floodwater stretched out like a sea on either side of the road. Nearer my place, I said to M.: "Turn left here, and drive across that meadow to the top of the bank. We may do ourselves a bit of good. As we scrambled out of the car we could hear duck voices all over the flooded ground below us, but, alas, instead of a fine background of white sky, great black clouds had now sailed up almost to cover the heavens, and we considered it useless to take out the guns. Finally, goodnights were said; an appointment made for a future date, and M.'s car roared off into the now clear night, leaving me feeling suddenly very tired.

Now that tiredness soon became almost an obsession, until I felt like leaving the cleaning of the gun, the feeding of the dog, the putting away of everything until next morning. Tiredness had turned to near-misery—very-near misery. But Duty is a stern and relentless taskmaster, and, though the cleaning of the gun took a good half-hour, for we had stood out all day in a mixture of rain, salt-laden wind, and what-have-you, and any fowler will tell you what sort of effect such conditions have upon a weapon. Engraved plates have turned black; barrels and rib are patchy with red rust; there is mud on the butt, the fore-end, and probably the barrels, while the grooves on either side of the rib require almost unbelievable care in getting them clean. All this in spite of the fact that barrels have been pulled through after shooting is over and the outer parts rubbed over with an oily rag.

My next step was to dry out the dog's ears and feed and water him. Then came the unpacking of mud-soaked "clobber" of various kinds. Finally, the "game" had to be hung up, and muddy sea-boots put away. All of which sounds a not unpleasant task, but is, in fact, sheer purgatory when one has reached a stage of, as I say, semi-consciousness. But at long last came the marriage of Near-Misery with Wonderful Relief—the tumbling in between cool sheets and the immediate sinking into oblivion.

We had not expected, when setting out that day, to shoot more than an odd curlew and duck. Some men might have given up almost at the start, instead of standing in the mud in a relentless downpour. However, before 11 o'clock we had gathered a mixed bag—four mallard, four teal, two wigeon, three snipe, and a redshank. A dead mallard and a dead curlew were, alas, "lost at sea." Yet had we shot really well, and had not "minor accidents" occurred, the bag could have been a good deal larger and more mixed. Certain periods of poor shooting apart, there were such "accidents" as the passing of parties of mallard, wigeon, and teal overhead quite unnoticed, for we were forced to keep a sharp and sometimes difficult watch on both sides of the seawall. Thus, time and again, single teal came over to be seen only after they were well past.

Vanished Into Low Cloud

On one occasion, I was watching an approaching flock of some 200 teal making dead for me, when they vanished into low sailing cloud, or sea-mist. On another occasion, I was watching M. preparing to shoot at some mallard, when a fine bunch of wigeon went past me behind. Then there was the time when I had been over the sea-wall to wave the dogs across the marsh to where a duck had fallen, and, on my return, had reloaded, but omitted to slip off the safety-catch. Two wigeon flew past low and in easy range, and, finding that the triggers would not budge, I had just not believed it, but continued to "pull," instead of slipping off the catch.

The funniest incident of the morning was when a single mallard, flying quite slowly, steadily, and well within range, came straight for M. He made a clean miss and was apparently too surprised to fire his second barrel. The bird showed no signs at all of having been shot at, but continued on at its leisurely pace, made a very wide circle of the floodtide, being just within sight at its farthest point, then came round again, with no height gained, straight over M.'s head. I waited in the rear, hoping that he would miss (!) but he brought the bird down. Why did the duck behave thus? I know that, at one point, it saw a man (not a gunner) and his dog walking on the sea-wall, and I rather fancy that, in worrying about them, it quite forgot its former experience and so eventually ran into trouble. But I think it must have been a hand-reared duck with less caution than its wilder relations.

Reverting to my earlier theme, man is not the only creature who reaches near-misery after a full day of salt-breezes and the crossing of acres of sticky, pulling muds and the clambering in and out of mud gutters, both wide and narrow. A dog can be tough and strong, and in hard shape, but, after a day's work under these conditions it, too, is "done in," and will often show the effects during the next day or two.

Don, for one, hates spartina grass. He will rush out through it to retrieve at any time, but, in returning, he walks exasperatingly slowly, and more delicately than Agag. The sharp spikes of this grass prick a dog's belly, but, more seriously, its feet (and its nose when searching) and my hound has sensitive feet with exceptionally large pads. Often enough his feet get badly cut, but always he is ready, as I am, to welcome Wonderful Relief at the end of a long day.

M. F. H.

by J. Ivester Lloyd

ON one of my rare visits to the cinema, I was much amused by a British film. Being a simple soul, I like laughing and this film was genuinely funny ; in fact, it was almost slapstick. Yet, even while I was holding my aching ribs and wiping away the tears of hilarity, I found myself regretting the one sad bloomer. It was the portrayal of a Master of Foxhounds.

For the opening scene was a meet of hounds at a village inn. I was ready to forgive the fact that the trees were in full leaf and that members of the field arrived at a canter, but I could not overlook the character of the M.F.H. He galloped on to the picture, rolling drunkenly in the saddle, cap glued to the back of his head, waving an untidy whip and bellowing " Halloa there, everybody ! "

I suppose that a regrettably large section of the public, who have not taken the trouble to learn the truth, imagine a Master of hounds to be like that. Either that or an arrogant bounder who tramples everything and everybody under the feet of his expensive horse while he blasts the hides off them with his blistering tongue.

There may have been such Masters of hounds, indeed, there almost certainly were, just as there are occasional white blackbirds and black foxes, but one with those habits would not last half a season today, and, with that Master, might pass the hunt of which he was head. Worse still, if there were a few like him, the sport itself would soon be finished.

The present day Master must combine the tact of an ambassador with a hundred other virtues and, since he is so much in the public eye, if he has any small vices he must keep them under discreet cover. Gone is the day when foxhunting was carried on by men who owned the hounds as well as the country over which they hunted. The fact that most packs now hunt over land owned by several hundred different people, by no means all of whom are interested in the sport, will never cease to amaze visitors from abroad. It is, of course, a tremendous indication of the open-heartedness of the average English farmer ; it is also a tribute to the characters of the men and women who have the courage to take on the Mastership of a pack of foxhounds.

On Television

To those who know little or nothing of sporting matters, it is often a cause for contemptuous comment that any one person in these allegedly democratic times should receive so much deference and command the authority which is claimed by an M.F.H. when in the hunting field.

Following the appearance on the television screen of a famous pack of hounds with hunt staff and a representative field, a Sunday newspaper critic wrote that the Master drew attention to the " caste system " of hunting by pointing out the difference in the number of buttons worn by members and servants. Somebody should have told that critic that, had the Master also been huntsman, he would have been proud to wear a huntsman's coat.

Naturally, the Master must be something of an autocrat, although nowadays he is a gentle one. In a way, he is in the same position as the captain of a football or hockey team ; he is very much " the boss " while the game is going on and a none the less genial companion at other times. But the Master of hounds, if he is to be a success as such, must contrive to be both at the same time—and for twelve months in the year.

There he is, at the meet, resplendent in hunt uniform, sitting a beautifully turned-out horse, near *his* hounds and *his* huntsman. Every male follower, on arrival, hastens to him, sweeps off his hat in an old-world, courtly gesture and bids him " Good morning, Master." The ladies are eager to catch his eye and to give him the same greeting, but with a special charm in their voices. To those of us who are on foot or on cycles, he appears almost as a demi-god. He it is who says which coverts shall be drawn, who marshals and quietens the field at the covertside and who, at the end of the day, gives the word for hounds to be taken home.

It would be excusable if a man, particularly if he is young, allowed such authority to go to his head. The reason that swollen heads are rare amongst Masters of hounds is found on the other side of the picture. The path of an

Just missed old Chorister !

M.F.H. is not roses all the way ; his life is not all horn and holloas. The deference which he has a right to expect from followers of his hounds must be earned by his personality and also by worry and sheer hard work. There, at the meet, the centre of everything, the " king pin," he returns greetings, beams on everybody and still remembers to ask Mrs. Greengage after her " latest " as she leans over her cottage gate. Who could guess his thoughts ?

Is there a fox in Hockdeep Wood and, if there is, will he be bolted by the crowd of village lads who have just gone clumping down the lane ? And if there *is* a fox there when hounds are put in which way will he run ? He hopes not over Manor Farm, for if he does some thoughtless ass is sure to leave a gate open so that the Colonel's T.T. herd strays amongst old Peastraw's screw cattle.

The Grey Kicks Out

Now, why does not that grinning monkey, whose mind is on something other than hunting, keep his wicked-looking grey facing hounds instead of showing them the red bow on its tail ? Ought the Master to point out his mistake now, while he is still able to be polite about it, or should he wait until a hound is kicked and then boil over ? There, just missed old Chorister !

Here comes that two-faced blighter known as " Flash Alec " with his too-tall topper cocked over one of his little pig-eyes, until he sweeps it off and nearly touches the ground as he wishes the Master " Good morning." The salute and greeting must be returned and the man thanked for his flattering remarks about the appearance of hounds, even though the M.F.H. knows that, behind his back, this is the worst " crabber " in the whole hunt.

The crowd swells, the horses, the people, the cars, and the Master is expected to remember every face. If only he had a thick skin, he would not be worried by hearing, next day, that somebody was " cut dead," but being the type of man he is, one who loves animals and people, he is more hurt than the victim of his imaginary slight.

Hounds Please !

Somebody in a white apron is holding a tray up to him and, if anybody deserves a cherry brandy it is he ! And now, praise heaven, the hour is upon him when he can really go hunting ; when he can say " Hounds, please ! " The crowd will open, horse and foot will give way and hounds will jog gaily on to their first draw while, at the head of the field, proud as he should be, rides he whom free men still delight to address by the ancient title of " Master."

For the next few hours, his Mastership will be put to the test. Adapting an old adage, I would say that the proof of the Master is in the sport he shows. If sport is good, then nobody will enjoy it more than the M.F.H. himself as he rides close to hounds on a good scent over the cream of the country.

As the hound music rings like festive bells in the winter air, he forgets the worries of Mastership ; he overlooks the fact that it is his privilege to find the difference between hunt expenses and the amount subscribed. As the huntsman cheers the pack with an eager " Forrard, forrard away—forrard ! " and the notes of his merry horn are echoed in the Master's heart, what place has worry there ?

The fresh air is cool on his cheeks, the green turf springy beneath the hooves of his horse, and the wide English countryside lies open in front of him. He knows then that it has all been well worthwhile. The work and preparation of summer, the attendance at shows, the talks to clubs, the ready smile for all-comers at all times, the tactful handling of difficult situations, the buying of horses, the breeding of hounds.

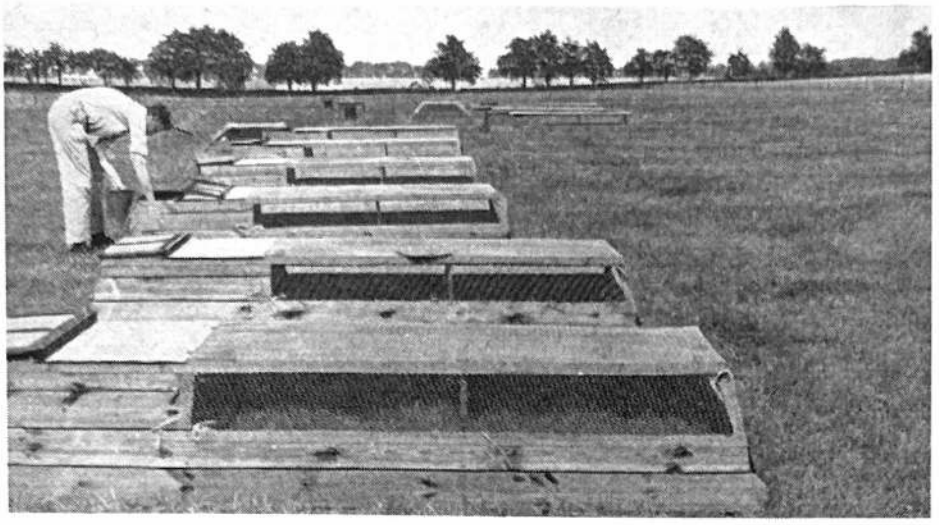
Best of all, perhaps, will be the memories of such runs as this, subjects for talk in farmhouses, or by the roadside or in taprooms, when he can tell the saga to those who, although they may not hunt, yet like to hear about the sport of others.

Yes, it is a courageous man or woman but, at the same time, a fortunate one, who puts after his or her name the magic letters " M.F.H."

Tricks of the Show Bench

The Kennel Club is to consider what action it can take against show exhibitors who artificially colour their pets to bring out their markings. Some exhibitors use stain and chalk to improve the appearance of an entry. This is against the Club's regulations. The Kennel Club recently received a complaint about a dog which had been artificially coloured and was later awarded first prize with a comment by the judge about its excellent markings.

The club is to consider a method by which the coat of a dog could be tested for colouring in the same way as the Jockey Club tests the saliva of a horse to detect doping. Said a club official : " In most cases it is over-eagerness on the part of owners to bring the best out in their dogs. It is not done with the intention of deceiving the judges."



Pens for handrearing partridges on a rearing field near Newmarket. Glass trap-door makes feeding easy, and converts covered in end into a sun parlour.

Experiment with Partridges

by David Cobham

Photographs by Noel Cunningham-Reid

IF it had not been for the exceptionally fine summer that we have enjoyed this year, the fate of the common or grey partridge might already have been decided. As it is, however, this fortunate spell of weather, which lasted from the middle of June till August, has given the partridge a chance to hatch and rear their families under ideal conditions. But two very severe summers, with periods of rain and cold winds around the hatching season and the crucial first three weeks, have, together with at least one disease rampant year, reduced the young to old count to something like 1:1.

The fine weather this year has enabled the partridge to pull up a little, and on most estates counts are up to two young to one old. Disease, however, has left its mark, and there are far too many barren pairs which have not produced any young at all. These old birds are a real menace, as they keep the younger birds from good nesting sites and feeding territory. Not only this, but often such birds are riddled with disease, contaminating the ground and passing disease on to healthy young birds.

The factors so far mentioned are really only incidental to the main cause in the decline in numbers of the partridge. "Time marches on" is surely the answer to the problem. Farming conditions nowadays are against the partridge, for civilisation with the mechanised and improved techniques in farming are not giving the partridge a chance. Nowadays, when most estates are split up and farmed by tenants, there are few owners who can control the cropping. Few landlords have much land in hand and as they have little or no control over tenants cropping, have to make the best use of the crop layout for shooting as it is.

Plentiful Food Supply Essential

There would seem to be two main periods in the year when the effects of changing farming techniques have a far-reaching effect on the partridge. In order that the birds can survive throughout the winter, to breed the following year, a plentiful supply of food must be assured for them. This was possible on land where a four-year shift system was adopted. Unfortunately, nowadays and particularly since the war, the general trend of cropping is such that the partridge in its natural state has little chance of existence.

Stubbles are ploughed-in straight away, or burnt almost as soon as the corn is cut, leaving very little for the partridge to feed on during the winter. Although insect life will be turned up when stubbles are first ploughed-in, this will last a few weeks at the most. As a result of this trend, not only is there a comparatively small amount of food for them as soon as stubbles are ploughed, but also there is no cover for them when the sugar beet crop has been lifted.

The second period influenced is the all-important one when the partridge rears its young. With recent advances in farming methods has come the use of chemical sprays and weed killers. These sprays range from those harmless to game, to those that kill ground game as well as feathered game, and are dangerous for weeks after application. Spraying done after June 1 with the more noxious sprays definitely increases the danger to old birds and the chicks they are trying to rear. Some of the chemical sprays used kill both the old birds and their chicks, so that a year's work spent rearing, trapping vermin, and winter feeding can be wiped out by ten minutes thoughtless spraying.

On this particular estate, once famous for the excellence of its partridge shooting, it was realised after the September sample count last year that unless steps were taken, it was doubtful if the partridge could re-establish itself in sufficient numbers to warrant a day's partridge driving. Accordingly, under the watchful eye of the I.C.I. Game Research Station, it was decided to hand-rear partridges with a two-fold intention. First, to put out a number of hand-reared birds, in order to boost up the wild breeding stock which had had no young birds for two years. Secondly, if this experiment was successful, it was hoped to be able to keep back a winter control of 30 or 40 birds. These would provide each year another generation of hand-reared birds.

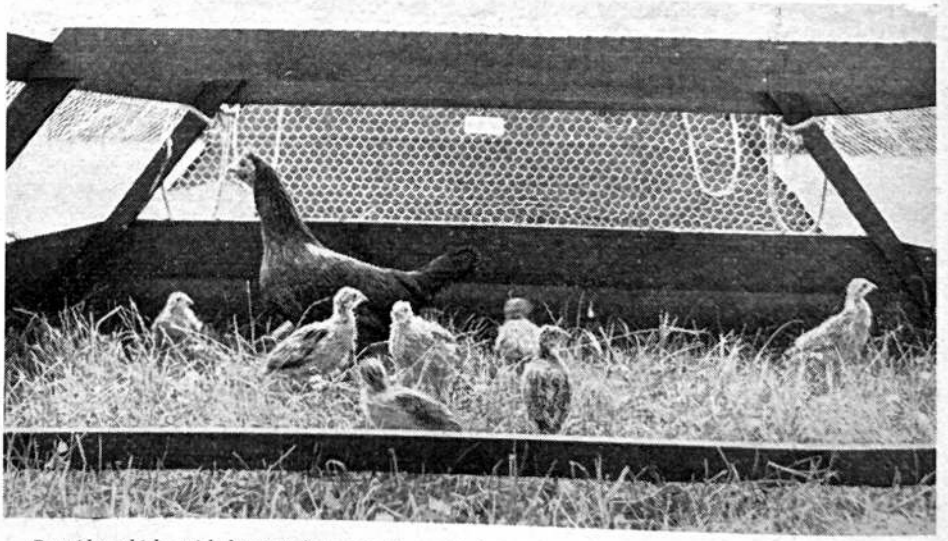
The Scheme in Action

So, in the spring and summer of this year, this scheme was put into action. A field was set aside for the rearing pens and the pens were constructed. These were 10ft. by 4ft., two-thirds of which were covered by fine-mesh wire netting and the rest boarded in as a shelter. This covered-in shelter had feeding and dusting trays and a piece of glass let into the roof so that the chicks could get plenty of sun, but no draught.

Five hundred and seven eggs were picked up off the beats and put under broodies. Of these eggs, 79 were rotten, 18 were trampled by the broodies, and a further 3 were broken in handling. Thus 407 eggs were hatched off successfully. The high proportion of rotten eggs can probably be accounted for by their having come from old and diseased stock.

Therefore, about 15 chicks were put into each pen with a bantam foster-mother. For the first five days everything seemed to be going really smoothly; only 8 chicks died during this period. However, from day 6 till day 11 the weather was most unkind—a cold east wind with rain. During this period, 139 chicks were picked up dead in the morning, the highest daily total being 39 on day 9. In part, this death roll can be put down to the weather. A factor, however, which certainly magnified these adverse conditions was that the boards making up the sides of the pens had not been tongued and grooved. Damp and a perishing draught got in, with the results shown as above.

The routine carried out was as follows. The chicks were fed five times daily until they were 14 days old. They were fed on a very fine meal into which was sieved hard-boiled eggs. For the first five days they were fed on meal alone, and from thereafter ant "eggs" were



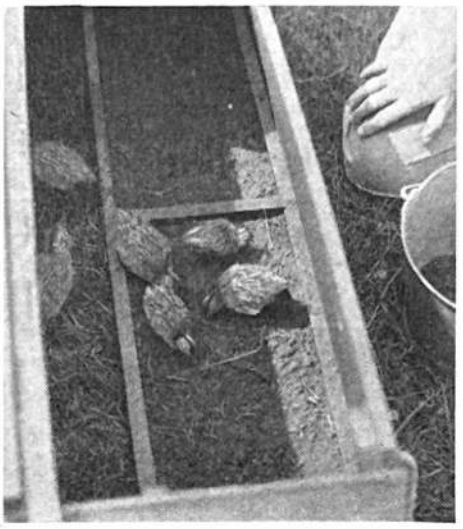
Partridge chicks with bantam foster mother. At four weeks it can be seen that there was some disparity in size.

added. Ant eggs were introduced as all partridge chicks feed mainly on insect life for the first few weeks. Accordingly, at the end of three weeks a little chopped grain was added to their feed, so that gradually they were weaned on to a cereal meal with a few ant eggs. As the chicks grew older and stronger, so the number of feeds were cut down. Four feeds from 14-28 days and three feeds after that.

At the end of six weeks we had 142 birds in the pens. Starting with 407 chicks, this meant that we achieved only 28% success. The great consolation drawn from this however was that it was considerably better than the wild birds had been able to manage. One interesting feature of the birds as a whole was that at six weeks old there were some birds feather perfect and full grown and others the size of three-week-old chicks with partially feathered bodies. This may have been caused by the sudden spell of cold weather and the fact that they were bred from old, weak, diseased stock.

At any rate, at six weeks old, the birds were turned out at various points on the estate. The bantams that had mothered them were put out as well, so that they could keep them together for the first few weeks out on their own. Coops were put out with them, so that they should have shelter at night. These were hardly used at all.

Of the final 142 birds, 38 were kept back for wintering as the control from which next year's hand-reared birds are to come. These were placed in the same pens as were used for rearing.



Feeding time. Four-week-old partridges feeding on "ant eggs."

In August, a sample count was made to see what the ratio of old to young birds was going to be. Although it was impossible to do a thorough count, as all the corn had not been cut, it was estimated that it would be at least two young to one old—a great improvement on last year. To give the young stock established this year a chance, it was decided to forego shooting them this season. However, as described earlier, there were too many barren pairs and groups of old birds taking up territory from which young birds would benefit. These old birds were picked off at the beginning of the season with a .22 rifle, in the hope that next year's birds will benefit from this.

There are three things essential if the partridge is to be successful next year: (a) There must be a big emphasis on winter feeding, so that the maximum percentage of potential breeding stock get through the winter. (b) We must hope for weather conditions similar to those this summer. (c) Tenant farmers must be tactfully advised to spray before June 1, and with sprays that are as harmless as possible.

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Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

Nov. 21: Annual General Meeting of the Scottish C.P.A., Perth, 3.30 p.m.
Nov. 27: Beverley and District G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot, 1.30 p.m.
Nov. 28: Annual General Meeting of the Welsh C.P.S.A., Hotel Metropole, Llandrindod Wells, Radnor, 3 p.m.
Dec. 4: Harrogate G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot, 1.45 p.m.
Dec. 10: London G.C., Northolt, Middlesex. Wappenshaw event.
Dec. 17: Billingsley and Chorley G.C., Bridgnorth, Shropshire. Wappenshaw event.
Dec. 17: Blandford and District G.C., Hedge End, Dorset. Wappenshaw event.
Dec. 18: Beverley and District G.C. Members' Christmas Shoot, 1 p.m.
Dec. 18: Bisley G.C., Brookwood, Surrey. Wappenshaw event, 10.30 a.m.
Dec. 26: Bowland and District G.C., Sawley, Clitheroe. Open Shoot, 10 a.m.

* * *

Reports and Results

The November Club shoot of the Bisley Gun Club attracted 27 guns, three of whom were visitors. The weather was by no means good, but six competitors reached a possible on handicap. After a tie shoot, Messrs. W. E. Harris and J. A. Baigent shared the H/Gun prize with 95, with L. H. Willis, also 95, being placed third. The handicap prizes were taken by T. G. Dennett, H. W. Tidd and G. Hickman, in that order. In the sweepstake which followed, Messrs. T. G. Dennett, R. A. Denham, P. Pemble and A. G. Beslee, all up on handicap, added and divided the spoils. Before shooting commenced, the Club President called on all present to observe the two minutes silence.

Mr. T. G. Dennett was making what was possibly his last appearance at Bisley before leaving to settle in Australia, and Mrs. Dennett kindly presented the prizes. Mr. Browning gave Mr. and Mrs. Dennett the best wishes of all Club members in their new life, and asked Mr. Dennett to accept a Club ash tray by which to remember his association with the Bisley Gun Club, and also his name plate. In a brief reply Mr. Dennett said that he would always have very happy memories of Bisley, where he had met a very fine bunch of sportsmen, and where he had made many friends. Mrs. Dennett was awarded the usual cheers and "Whisper"—the latter being even more vociferous than usual.

The meeting heard with profound regret of the death of one of its oldest and most popular members, Mr. T. H. Hughes. "Tommy" as he was always affectionately called, was an hon. life member of the Club, and he will be very greatly missed by his multitude of friends where ever clay targets are thrown.

The next shoot will be the Wappenschaw, on Sunday, December 17, when all competitors are reminded that they must bring a prize, and that all will be sure of winning one. The Club secretary wishes it to be known that his new address is at 141 Boundary Road, Woking, Surrey.

Wildfowling Clubs

The next general meeting of the Kent Wildfowlers' Association will be held on Saturday, November 26, at 7.30 p.m. when Brigadier G. D. Holmes, assistant secretary of W.A.G.B.I., will talk on the role and organisation of W.A.G.B.I. This meeting will take place at The Fox and Goose, at Bapchild, where there is an illuminated car park. The Fox and Goose is about 1 mile beyond the old meeting place on the Faversham Road, and lays on the left hand side at the foot of a hill.

It is hoped to arrange a general meeting on Saturday, December 17, and Mr. S. A. R. Smith has kindly agreed to talk on birds' eggs.

The Kent Ornithological Society has invited our members to their next meeting on December 3 at 6 p.m. at the Congregational Church (Dunning) Hall off Week Street, Maidstone, and it will deal with the recent census of the birds of the Medway Islands.

Forthcoming Field Trials

SECRETARIES OF FIELD TRIAL SOCIETIES ARE INVITED TO SEND US REPORTS OF THEIR TRIALS FOR PUBLICATION IN "THE SHOOTING TIMES." REPORTS SHOULD BE SENT DIRECT TO THE KENNEL EDITOR, MR. P. R. A. MOXON, HERNE COMMON, HERNE BAY, KENT.

Nov. 18: Scottish Gundog Association. (Spaniels.) Cromlix, Dunblane. Secretary: J. M. Manson, Glengour House, Ferryhills, Inverkeithing, Fife.

Nov. 18: Spaniel Club. Nantyr Hall, Nr. Llangollen. Secretary: T. J. Greatorex, Corndean, Hodnet, Shropshire.

Nov. 22: Southern and Western Counties Field Trial Society. (Non-Winners' Stake.) Chilbolton Down, Nr. Stockbridge. Judges: Mr. W. Lawrence Taylor, Major D. Blackett and Mr. R. Male. Secretary: R. F. H. Cowen, Sutton Manor Estate Office, Sutton Scotney, Winchester, Hants.

Nov. 23 & 24: Western Counties and South Wales Spaniel Club. The Crown Estate, Staple Park, Nr. Taunton. Judges: Capt. R. W. Corbett and Mr. R. J. Biddlecombe. Secretary: H. T. Davis, 69 Durleigh Road, Bridgwater, Somerset.

Nov. 25 & 26: Labrador Retriever Club. (Open Stake.) Idsworth, Horndean, Hants.) Secretary: S. W. Dangerfield, Lindsay, Cookham, Berks.

Dec. 2 & 3: Yorkshire Gundog Club. (Spaniels.) Secretary: Mrs. E. H. Bailey, Long Close, Bolton Hill, Bessacarr, Nr. Doncaster.

Dec. 6, 7 & 8: Retriever Championship. Sandringham, Norfolk. Judges: Mr. Vincent Routledge, Mr. J. Arthur Rank, J.P., The Earl of Northesk. Secretary: E. Holland Buckley, The Kennel Club, 84 Piccadilly, London, W.1.

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Jan. 6: Southern and Western Counties Field Trial Society. (Novice Stake.) Sutton Manor. Judges: Mr. J. Arthur Rank, Lady Hill Wood and Mr. J. C. S. Charles. Secretary: R. F. H. Cowen, Sutton Manor Estate Office, Sutton Scotney, Winchester, Hants.

In the Kitchen

By PENELOPE TURING

IN really cold weather, hard frosts or icy winds, baked potatoes are one of the most warming foods one can find. This recipe is a good way of making them part of the main dish itself, and not a mere vegetable.

Potato snipe. Take some large potatoes and scrub them, then cut them in halves and scoop out a hole in each piece large enough to take the snipe when the potato is put together again. Cut off the head, shanks, and remove the gizzard, and season each bird inside with pepper, salt and a small piece of margarine. Then put the snipe inside the potatoes, tie them together with thread or string and bake until the potatoes are soft.

Broiled Grouse. Here is a recipe for the last weeks of the grouse season. Split the bird down the back, cut it open and remove the head and feet. Press flat on a table and skewer through from side to side. Sprinkle generously with finely-chopped shallot, pepper and salt, and brush all over with melted cooking fat. The grouse should cook in about 15 minutes, and needs to be turned frequently and well basted during the cooking. Cranberry or tomato sauce can be eaten with it.

Peach Salad. This makes a delicious and unusual "extra" with any kind of game. Drain some tinned peaches free of all syrup, cut in small slices and arrange on a bed of lettuce leaves. Make the dressing as follows: Mix together 2 teaspoons of sugar, 1 of celery-salt, a little ordinary pepper and salt, a pinch of cayenne, and three or four drops of cayenne vinegar. When well mixed add, a little at a time, 4 tablespoons of salad oil and 2 of lemon juice. Pour over the peaches and lettuce.

Tactics with Pheasants

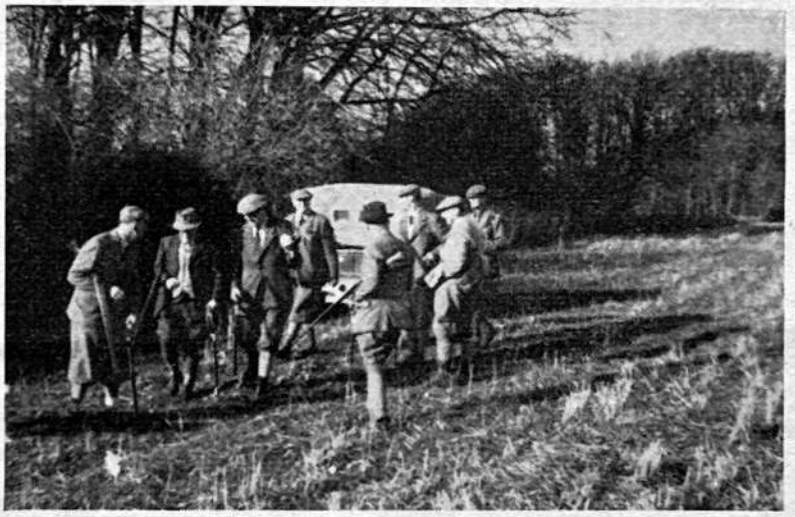
(Concluded)

by Edgar N. Barclay

FEW will disagree that well-managed pheasant shooting based on the method of flushing from detached coverts is the best and most spectacular manner of showing birds. The long line of guns and beaters steadily moving forward, knowing perhaps that some hundreds of pheasants are in front of them: the occasional shots at odd cock birds which squat, flush, and then turn back over the line: The chances at woodcock, pigeon, and ground game as the line slowly advances, till finally the pheasants are safely shepherded into the intended cover from which they will subsequently be flushed and sent flying home high and fast over well-placed guns.

As well as being the best method it is also almost the only method by which a fair percentage of the older cocks can be accounted for. Hens have not the same sense of preservation and will easily blunder into situations of danger which the males would instinctively avoid. Even cock birds in their first year display this superior sense, whilst the real old stagers become as cunning as any fox knows how to be.

If you plan a day's shooting on their own home ground it is extraordinary how many of them just seem to disappear from the scene of operations. You may shoot a wood hard, ending with a day at a cocks only, and be left with the impression that only a few remain, but visit that same wood at dusk on the following evening and you will probably be surprised at the number of cocks which make their presence known by the familiar crow as they go aloft to roost in their accustomed places.



Guns discussing the last drive before moving off to lunch.

Out of the Home Woods

Though the method of driving pheasants out of their home woods to isolated cover for flushing is widely practiced, it still has not been adopted as generally as it might be. Sometimes there seems to be a reluctance to break with tradition, but because a covert has been driven in one particular way for as long as can be remembered is no good reason for continuing in that manner if by a change of plan better shooting would result. Fear of failure should not be a deterrent, for even if the first attempt is not a complete success your birds will still be there for another occasion.

There are, of course, some woods, particularly in these days when so many shootings have been split up, where no suitable detached holding ground is available, but even in such cases a modified form of the principle can be operated. Select a corner of your wood, preferably furthest from the place where the majority of the pheasants feed and roost, and regard this as your holding ground for flushing. The undergrowth in this area should be thick, except just along the frontage where the birds will be made to run in. If necessary, the centre can be thickened without much trouble.

Fix the most suitable positions for the guns with due regard to the standing timber, and clear, or thin, the surrounding undergrowth so that the best possible field of view is opened up. Such clearance also assists the pick-up after a rise.

Drive your wood in strips, from one end to the other, in the direction of the flushing point, the width and number of strips being dependent on the normal length of your line of guns and beaters. The beats are best divided by permanent narrow rides, but failing that some stakes stripped of bark, so that they can be easily seen, will help to define the limits of each beat.

Throughout each drive only shoot birds which flush and turn back, but do not press them too hard, as the object is to keep them running forward at their own pace. Towards the end of each drive the line should wheel in the direction of the flushing point and halt immediately the birds reach their destination.

When driving either of the outside strips of a wood the gun, or beater, on the flank should keep as closely as possible to the outside edge, as pheasants are very liable to make for the boundary, and if there is nobody there to turn them they will often slip back behind the advancing line You will not necessarily employ every gun and beater in the driving line; stops may be required, and a tendency for birds to flush at some particular point may necessitate a gun being posted to deal with them, but every bird going in the direction of the flush should be allowed to go forward.

Once your birds are safely collected in the flushing cover, it is advisable to run netting round it, as they are still on their home ground and therefore more liable to run out. It is also a great help, if not a necessity, for subsequent flushing operations, which should be carried out in the same manner as from a detached covert.

A rise carried out on these lines may not have quite the same possibilities as a flush from remote cover, but it certainly provides better shooting than the older and simpler method of driving a wood in sections to guns posted on rides, or, if the shape of the wood lends itself to it, to guns posted in the open.

Flushing Points

The latter method is, I think, the least interesting way of shooting pheasants. Nets are commonly used for flushing the birds well in advance of the line of guns, but the point to remember is that stops should be placed at both ends of the netting, or alternatively the flank beaters must reach it well in advance of the rest of the line. Failure to do so may result in birds running alongside the whole length of the net and out of the beat.

The great disadvantage of this method of pheasant shooting is that the birds are rarely high enough to provide really good shooting. Often they are much too low. It is not an uncommon experience towards the end of a beat to have a sudden stream of low birds just over your head, or that is how they seem to be. This can be rather disconcerting, particularly to a beginner, and it is all too easy to make a mess of the situation. The great thing to do is to keep cool and pick your shots. Nobody will appreciate your performance if, at the end, you have a lot of smashed birds which are unfit for table or market. If, on the other hand, you have just a few birds, cleanly killed, which in this case means shot only in the head, your action will meet with general approval.

Difficult Shooting

Such shooting is more difficult than it sounds, for your aim must be almost as true as if shooting with ball instead of shot. In the last century Prince Victor Duleep Singh was an adept at this kind of shooting. He was one of the quickest shots of his day, and on one occasion, shooting with three guns and two loaders, he kept up an almost machine-gun rate of fire to kill eighty-one pheasants at almost point-blank range, of which all but six were perfectly fit for market. A remarkable feat which only a super-shot could accomplish, but do not attempt to emulate it, as there were far more pheasants then than now, and a similar performance these days would be quite out of place. In any case, these sudden bursts of low pheasant are more likely to occur by accident than design, and it is far better to take just a few and let the rest go by to make better birds for a subsequent occasion.

A very different kind of shooting is met with over wild, rough country, more typical of Scotland than England, where great straggling woods of irregular shape clothe broken hillsides, and heather or heath takes the place of the cultivated lands of the south. Thick cover is everywhere, and pheasants rise from unsuspected places to fly in unpredictable directions. It is a grand setting for wild pheasants, but some of these woods are veritable jungles and only an army of beaters and stops can hope to drive them successfully.

Beaters in quantity are often difficult to obtain and the only alternative is a team of well-trained spaniels. Springers have been used with success for this type of work, but perhaps even better would be clumbers, as they are slower and less headstrong than springers, and with their dense coats they will plough through the thickest undergrowth.

I do not know why the popularity of these grand dogs should have waned, but under modern conditions perhaps we may see a revival of this splendid breed. The clumber has sometimes been called an old man's spaniel, but the characteristics implied are just what is needed in a canine beater.

The Home Secretary has refused a request from Worcestershire County Council to place the little owl on the list of birds which can be killed or captured at any time. So it seems that he supports the naturalists who say that it feeds mostly on insects, mice and rats and that there is no evidence that it kills game and poultry chicks.

Queen Victoria's archway at Fettercairn, near which a record bag was shot.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

NOVEMBER is generally wearing towards its end before covert shooting gets into full swing. Pheasants are mature then, and are able to test the skill of connoisseurs, if they are presented by keepers who have a complete knowledge of pheasant psychology. This is really the main point. One man will stick to an outworn technique when he beats out his coverts, while another will try always to introduce something new, so that the shooters are never sure whether they can deal with his birds or not. I have seen pheasants driven in such an uninspired fashion that they could have been shot successfully by a team of tyros, and I have seen them presented by a different keeper from the same coverts so cunningly that only experts could hope to bag them.

A great deal depends, of course, on the layout of one's coverts and the number of pheasants at one's disposal. Obviously it is a waste of time to try out a complicated beating system with half a dozen birds, because every item bagged in these hard up conditions is valuable. But where several hundreds of pheasants have been put to covert (and have survived the attentions of poachers) there is at least something for a good keeper to exercise his brains upon.

Effective Stopping

The others who are not good keepers would do well to bear in mind that pheasants will usually fly better when they are determined to get back to their own feeding and roosting places against some real or imagined opposition. And this means that the birds must be driven away from home sometimes without having a shot fired at them. Too often we have seen pheasants put over guns on a ride in their home covert at such a low altitude that they simply were not worthy of powder and shot, when they could just as easily have been beaten into an adjoining covert and brought back over the shooters at a greater height and speed. Naturally, if an adjoining covert is used in this way, it must be stopped effectively, and this indicates a bigger team of beaters; but the extra outlay is worthwhile. And it need not be more than a little extra if the shooters are willing to do a bit of beating also.

In places where the main covert is on low ground and a suitable "rising" covert is situated on higher ground nearby it is often difficult to make the birds undertake the upward journey. Actually it is better to throw down some feed in a place of this sort every day for a month before the first shoot; but if no plans have been made in advance, this help is likely to have been neglected; so the birds have to be shepherded very carefully uphill, otherwise they will rise in a cloud, and fly over the heads of the beaters. Worse still, they may not accept any driving again during the same day in that direction if they have rejected it once in a panic. Therefore, I say, the transference must be conducted carefully, and if the pheasants can be made to run the whole distance, so much the better for everyone concerned, except themselves. Above all, the shooters must not get into action before all the birds are out of sight in the upper covert. No doubt, there is a temptation to fire at birds which break back into the lower covert, but this must be resisted. And the whole beating operation must be carried out as quietly as possible.

It is an advantage if a higher covert of this sort is covered fairly thickly with undergrowth; but if the floor happens to be rather bare, I should try to fill up with brushwood which could be arranged in open heaps here and there, so that pheasants might feel some security where it does not really exist. This alteration would not always be easy perhaps if a syndicate had the shooting; but there is no reason why a landowner with his own shooting in hand should prevent his keeper from making it better. Living under-cover would, of course, be a greater improvement, and if the keeper is given complete freedom, he might make an upper covert first-class from a game shooting point of view by filling it with laurel and rhododendron. These shrubs make attractive undercover for pheasants. They also make cover for rabbits, but this drawback can be nullified by a vigorous keeper.

The Home Covert

One must admit, however, that a high-lying covert suitable for pheasant shooting with a little attention is rarely found near a well-stocked home covert. More often is the home covert standing alone, or within a comparatively short distance of strips, spinneys, and other minor coverts. In former times the main covert was shot first, then the party moved on to those lesser beats, which had probably been fed occasionally, or had feed stacks installed in them. This was a sound enough system. Birds were not harried unduly, and the shooting was satisfying without being spectacular. Many a score of estates followed this system year after year.

Nevertheless, a knowledgeable keeper of today might evolve something better. He might, for instance, beat a few of those small coverts into the main one before the shooters appeared in the morning, then drive all the concentrated pheasants into the far corner of the main covert after they have arrived, but before they went into their positions. After this the shooters would be lined out to intercept the birds as they flew back to their own haunts, and the sport would begin. It is practically certain that a move of this kind would result in a bigger and more satisfactory first drive than was ever made previously by beating the main covert straight through. If the covert were very large, another beat could possibly be made to the original stands; but stops must be used.

Shooting From Kale

I have also seen good shooting from a big acreage of kale which was on a slight rise about 150 yards from a well-stocked covert. The pheasants were manœuvred cautiously into this cover without any shooting, and brought back over the guns to their home. This improvised drive provided much more spectacular shots than were ever got by ordinary, straight-through beating, and it was a credit to the keeper who realised the possibilities of this field of green-crop. A more timid man would have stuck to orthodox methods, but "safety first" is not always the best policy in shooting.

In pre-war times when we were engaged largely on pheasant production it was easy for us to note the reactions of our birds to all sorts of beating. At the beginning of the season everything went smoothly as a rule, because the siting of our coverts had been planned long ago by people who knew the mentality of pheasants. We drove our birds from the lower coverts to the higher ones without guns, then drove them home again (at a considerable height) over guns. Sooner or later, however, our quarry became "educated," and it was then that some original thinking was needed. At this stage we executed several unorthodox drives, but every one of them was based on the sound theory that pheasants will almost always try to get back to their home territory when they are flushed. Any keeper who bears this in mind will not go wrong.

Trouble is likely to begin when a keeper is so inexperienced in the ways of pheasants that he tries to drive them out into the blue. In a move of this kind the birds run forward in front of the beaters until they reach the end of the covert, then they rise and fly back. A few of the bolder ones may decide to go over the guns, but this type of drive is so often a failure that it is not worth the bother involved.

I am reminded here that several times lately I have passed through the estate of Fasque in the neighbourhood of Fettercairn village where the record bag of pheasants for Scotland was made. I am not sure of the exact figure, but it was over 3,000. The village is further distinguished by a triumphal archway which commemorates a visit by Queen Victoria during one of her tours of the Highlands from her home at Balmoral. On this auspicious occasion the Queen spent the night at Fettercairn; so this quiet corner of Kincardineshire is worthy of an honourable mention at least in history.

WIGEON FLIGHT

by Ruff

HARRY and I had planned this shoot some weeks ago. Now, when it was almost upon us, we suffered those doubts and fears so common to people who embark on such ventures as ours. On the eve of the trip, we gazed hopefully through the window at the frosty roof of the house opposite, wondering if the weather would hold, our minds running over the last details of the plan. At 11 p.m., when we most needed sleep, we decided on one more check through the list of equipment needed to make a success of the following day. Guns in good order, sufficient cartridges of the right type, tide times checked and their heights worked out, food etc. packed, and the hundred and one items which are, of necessity, last-minute jobs.

It was midnight before we were completely satisfied, and time was short. Sleep was now the commodity which we would lack, in spite of, or rather because of our elaborate and careful planning. Laboriously we made the sanctuary of the bedroom almost on our knees, with the final encouraging words of our host ringing in our ears. "Thar would na be goin' art in yon darned boat if that wore my childer."

During the night, it was so cold I wondered how the alarm clock worked, but work it did—at 4 a.m. Father Time was the only unrelenting witness to our hurried departure from warm and comfortable beds, so, minus a much needed breakfast, we were away, running down the road at full speed. By what can only be described as a grim and memorable effort to recover lost time, we arrived ten minutes later at the local quayside, shaking and perspiring, but eager to leave behind the darkened faces of the houses facing the open sea. A few moments work was all that was necessary to fuel and secure the Seagull outboard motor to the transom of our twelve-foot dinghy Diana, whose flat bottom (bless her!) and light weight made her the ideal boat for such as Harry and me. She was seaworthy and able to stand considerable rough usage, and had in the past delivered us through gales on to the quayside, wet and cross, but safe.

Anxious to Get Going

Spurred by the thoughts of wigeon and geese, the wild calls of which we could hear some miles out on the sands, stiff fingers worked frantically at hard and frozen knots, fingers already numbed by petrol spilled over them in our anxiety to tend the motor and be away. Frost caked and decking, making movement in the boat precarious and bringing to my mind the first thoughts of failure. The second pull of the starting rope dispelled these fears, and in a few minutes we thrilled at the pure delight provided by nine knots of speed through the starlight of a frosty morning, in a channel, every turn of which we knew by heart. Each corner and shallow spot successfully negotiated primed us with a growing sense of achievement and carried us nearer to our Eldorado.

As we swished along on the ebb race between the lanes of glistening and frosty samphire and zostera beds, we neared the last corner of the main channel. I listened closely for the harsh sound of gurgling water rushing over the old wreck, grim monument to some incautious helmsman of the past. We were upon it before I was able to slow down. A twist of the tiller cleared the bows, but sent the stern swinging in a wide arc towards the barnacle-covered bowsprit standing out a foot above the cascade of angry spray. Harry, standing upright a few feet in front of me, turned and gave a confident smile as we cleared the obstruction with inches to spare. I wondered what his reaction would have been to seeing that gnarled pinnacle of pine come smashing through the glossy sides of Diana.

Seconds later, the vague outline of the main channel entrance had swept past, to melt into the darkness astern. Before us lay the maze of surging waterways along which we had now to feel our way. Islands of sand and mud seemed to rush past at breakneck speeds. I throttled down the motor in order to hear Harry's sharp words of command from the bows giving the depth of water in feet. "Two feet! One-and-a-half! Three feet! No bottom —!" I breathed a sigh of relief and increased speed to three-quarters. Thirty minutes more of twisting and turning should see us safely at our destination, leaving us time to study the lay of the island which was accessible only for short periods after spring tides.

A frosty dawn and an ebbing tide.

It seemed only a short time before we sighted the indistinct hump of clean, hard sand, and the last hundred yards inspired Harry to a muted cheer. The silence which followed the grating of the keel as it brushed the shallows and the last spluttered revs of the motor, was broken only by the plaintive cry of a few redshank disturbed from this remote and rarely attainable outpost which was ours for an hour at the most. Diana safely moored by twenty feet of stout manilla attached to a home-made anchor, completed the first half of the journey, leaving the purpose of the trip to be decided by good, bad, or indifferent shooting.

Digging-In

Digging-in was a Herculean task. Water filled the shallow depression as I dug, leaving me the choice of an uncomfortable hide, or none at all. I chose the first alternative in my determination to give a good account of myself to the wigeon, which I hoped would hurtle in to alight round me. Later, lying in my watery lair and glancing at the decoys set round in various positions, I felt assured of success by their realistic bobbing and weaving on the water twenty yards ahead. Harry was nowhere to be seen having found a suitable position elsewhere in the quarter-mile wide circle of sand.

The cold intensified by a miserable east wind would favour the birds in their flight over us. Streaks of dark cloud on the distant horizon parted to give a display of colours seen only on a frosty dawn such as this. I watched the dull red change into an impossible pale green and purple hue whilst searching the sky for signs of life. A great black-backed gull swung over the edge of the water as if suspended by strings, to scan my decoys. Not satisfied by the silence ensuing from these dark shadows, he passed on to more distant hunting grounds. The roar of Harry's magnum galvanized me into action.

Neglected to Load

Hardly had I wiped the frost from the rib of my gun-barrels, when in countless hoards the wigeon were upon me, swooping on whispering wings over the decoys and leaving me little room to raise my weapon. Two ominous clicks signified my carelessness and I hastened to put to rights the mistake of having neglected to load. A second flock of wigeon, warned by my movements, split into two groups, one party to the left, the other to the right, leaving in the centre a pair of teal rocketing upwards. My first shot brought the lowest tumbling down to land with a splash amongst the decoys. My second missed.

Before I could recover the kill, seven dim shapes, wings set in a graceful curve, swept in from the front. As they turned in an arc to alight amongst the decoys on the left, I was able to account for the last bird. The remainder scattered, whistling their disapproval to the sky. A cock lagging behind, dropped in a flurry of wings and legs, landing fifty yards out from the hide. Rarely am I able to achieve a right and left, so I warmed to the occasion by bringing to book a lone ranger with the next shot.

In the shooting which followed, I recovered eleven birds, leaving those which had trailed off in the distance to be recovered later. The geese flew all around us, but were wise enough to realise that the attractive spit of sand was dangerous. Possibly the glistening heap of spent cartridges served as a unique warning to them. Gradually all grew quiet and peaceful as the sun rose to shine on this mecca of wildfowling. Harry stumbled over the rise behind me, his face red and shining, and implored my help in retrieving his lost birds. At the count, we strung twenty-four wigeon, three teal, and a fine couple of mallard.

A Strange Campaign

The Philippine Government is encouraging people to eat rats as part of a campaign to exterminate the pests from the islands, says the British United Press.

A dinner held in a provincial town recently included a course of rat meat cooked in a rich garlic sauce as part of the campaign. Dominador Chipeco, the Governor of Laguna, said that he thought the rats were "delicious."

Deserted by all but the cattle by day, at dusk it may provide the flight of a lifetime.

The Young Shot

Of Dogs and Duck

by Petrel

A FRIEND of mine has a very good gundog, and a very good reason for this happy state of affairs. Anyone can do the same, he claims; the recipe is simple. All you need is a pup from a good working strain, a copy of Richard Sharpe's book *, and you can't go wrong. Results have proved him, and many others like him, right. For some time it has been very much easier to obtain the right sort of puppy than it has been to buy the necessary book, but now at last, after six years, all amateur dog trainers, and *Shooting Times* readers in particular who remember the late Dick Sharpe as Kennel Editor of this journal, will welcome the news that his "Dog Training By Amateurs," has been reprinted by *Country Life*, in response to many requests from all over the world. Since recently reading this book I have been able to adapt an obsolete and useless piece of equipment (and I do not mean my hound!) to good advantage.

You may remember that some time ago I described an ancient model of a humane rabbit trap, discovered amongst a pile of junk in a cellar. As a rabbit trap it seemed singularly ineffective, and as such it is, of course, even more useless today. But as an item of dog training equipment for teaching steadiness and marking, it has come in very handy in the role of the spring thrower developed by Dick Sharpe.

For steadiness I will give Kerry D. eight out of ten. There are some days when he scores full marks, but there are occasions, if he is hunting ahead, when enthusiasm overcomes obedience, and a short chase after a missed pheasant—it only seems to happen with pheasants—occurs. In an effort to remedy this and refresh his memory of a good education, the rabbit trap was brought out of its musty museum.

Simply Adapted

Now as you may recall, although similar to look at, this type of trap is quite different in action from the gin. It has no jaws, but merely a hollow square of metal on a very strong spring designed, presumably, to crush the victim against the roof of burrow or tunnel in which it is set. It is actuated in the same way as a gin trap by plate and catch. It was no great engineering feat to fix four short wire arms on the square part of the spring which will support a dummy the weight of a pheasant—or even a dead pheasant—and to mount with staples the trap on a heavy flat piece of wood.

The engine is hidden in a thick piece of cover, the trap is set and the dummy placed in position. A length of cord is attached to the plate and run out taut to a peg. I then walk up the "set" with the dog and at the right moment kick the cord and spring the trap, which shoots the dummy into the air, whereupon it is "shot" or let go and the hound is suitably restrained if he shows signs of running in. By elevating the trap it can be made to throw the "bird" horizontally instead of vertically and it is surprising how far it will travel, propelled by this long, flat spring.

Yankee Doodle

I was rather pleased with this adaptation but soon afterwards I realised that my ingenuity was nothing compared with that of the American inventor who is advertising a novel piece of kennel equipment as "the ideal Christmas gift for the hard-to-buy-for person on your list." Designed to make easy the cleaning of kennel or run without any back-bending, it is something like a pair of long-handled edge-trimming shears. The best part about it is its name, "The Sooper Dooper Pooper Scooper." Well, I'll be doggoned!

I have always been struck by the lack of initiative, enterprise and even intelligence displayed by those in search of a bit of rough shooting, especially when the question of duck crops up. Last week I received a sledge-hammer blow when I called at a farm in an attempt to extend my "shootings."

The farmer turned out to be a very good sort, but unfortunately the shooting was let to two old men and a boy, and he went on to relate what a fine year it was for pheasants and how many he had on his land. Knowing that he also owned three rushy water meadows, I enquired about duck and snipe. "Well there's a funny thing," he said. "The place is teeming with duck—in fact when the rains come they're a darned nuisance, for they come and dig up the lawn. But these fellows never seem to bother about those meadows. In fact, they don't come here at all above three or four times, and very seldom in the hard weather."

Short-Sighted Shooters

Would you believe it? I know these guns live some distance away and probably cannot stay until all hours, but I am even more certain. incredible though it may seem, that they are completely unaware that duck use these meadows, and quite oblivious of what they are missing. What a waste, and how I was tempted to broach the subject to them, with a suggestion that we might come to some "arrangement." On second thoughts, however, I decided to say nothing, for the less they know of what lies under their nose, the more quickly may they decide to give up their distant shoot. Needless to say, I am next in line for it.

Another, enquiring where I shot, showed surprise when I mentioned a certain small field. "But there's nothing there," he said. "At least I've never seen anything. Besides, it's too near the village." As I rent the place on a long lease I had no qualms about telling him; of the wisps of snipe to be found there, as thick as starlings; of the two coveys of partridges that jug there; and of how, when the winter rains turn the rich grazing into a soggy morass, the duck flight in to the flood in tens and twenties from November until the end of the season.

Like so many others, he looked for the obvious places and thought them the only ones worth bothering about; the cress-beds where the owner feeds his flight pool with rotten bananas; the streams and lakes and ponds. But it is surprising how small a patch of water will attract duck, and how quickly they will find it, and nothing draws them like a fresh flood where the sweet meadow grasses are lush and easily obtainable food in the shallows. Wherever there is water there is a chance of shooting a duck, but there is only one way of discovering whether the birds are using it. You must go there when the rest of the world are drawing up their chairs to the fire and switching on the lights, and watch and wait and find out for yourself. You may draw blank time after time, but in the end you will hit upon the right place. Never give up the search.

And speaking of a search, I let myself in for a longer one than should have been necessary on Saturday, and I had only myself to blame. Waiting by a dewpond at dusk I had already shot one duck and decided to hang on a little while longer, but the next lot caught me napping and, coming in over my shoulder, landed invisible on the water. I stood up in the hide and "shooed," up they got and a snap shot at a shadow merging into darkness brought a very obvious runner down in the meadow beyond the pool.

I sent out the dog, who had not seen the fall, and away he went at top speed casting for the line, to emerge from the darkness a moment later, still at the gallop, with the duck.

Forgetful and casually I held out my hand, he made a perfect delivery, and away flapped the bird for the safety of the water, where it immediately dived. We searched in vain in the darkness for twenty minutes and then gave up until the next morning, when the hound soon discovered the duck, still very lively, in the rushes.

The moral is, unless it is very obviously dead, treat every retrieve as a runner and if it is a duck, take it from the dog well away from water. Apart from anything else, you feel such a fool when you let your dog down.

* *"Dog Training By Amateurs," by R. Sharpe (Country Life Ltd., 8s. 6d.).*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters, and photographs relating to them, for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published.

THE MODERN FOWLER CRITICISED

Sir,—I see by "The Secretary's Notes" under "Wildfowling Clubs" (issue October 28) that the importance of duck rearing schemes, and the part they can play in the fight against the ever-present threat of "protective" legislation, has been made very clear.

While I am in full agreement with all that he says, I believe that it is just as important to try to educate the fowler in the more useful aspects of conservation.

One of the greatest faults to be found in the ranks of the shooters is that we seem to be overburdened with people (I could hardly call them sportsmen) who, though ready enough to criticise othe people's efforts to improve the sport, are perfectly useless themselves. Their attitude to rearing seems to be based on the assumption that if they do not shoot *all* the birds so reared, then the whole thing is a failure.

It is my experience that present-day fowlers, instead of taking the interest in the sport that present-day conditions require, are still jogging along the same old trail followed by their fathers, regardless of where it leads to. If these people are as short-sighted in shooting as they are in policy, it is doubtful if they could sees past the end of the gun-barrels. The point is, however, that there are far too many of this type, and they will do more harm than any protectionist body unless they are re-educated.

Duck rearing schemes will only be as successful as the spirit behind them, and it is my belief that, before we get the required amount of effort, a change in the future outlook of many fowlers will have to take place.

T. WIGHTMAN,
Newtownards.

BUZZARD CARRYING MAGPIE

Sir,—I enclose a cutting from the *Cornish Guardian* (issue October 27) which may be of interest.

As there are large numbers of buzzards in this area the question of what they "take" is always a subject for discussion. The other morning early my friend saw one cross the road carrying a magpie, and we would like to know if any keepers have heard of this before.

JOHN H. WARD,
Newquay, Cornwall.

[Thank you for the cutting which is far too long to reproduce, but it is headed "Destruction of Rabbits Will Not Cheapen Food — Farming May Benefit But Not the Harassed Housewife."—Ed.]

SHORESHOOTING NEAR TYNEMOUTH

Sir,—Being an exile from the Somerset Moors, each week after reading the *S.T.*, I long to see the gaggle of geese, and hear the shrill of wigeon.

I wonder, therefore, if any of your readers could put me on to a little shoreshooting within reasonable distance of Tynemouth?

W. J. STONE,
Cullercoats,
Northumberland.

SHOOTING GREEN PLOVER

Sir,—I wish to say how strongly I feel against the shooting of the green plover. This bird does a great deal of good by eating injurious insects such as worms, wireworms, slugs and snails, thus earning its name as "the farmer's friend."

Mr. Tegner in his letter said that the potential number shot would be a flea-bite compared with the casualties suffered by eggs and young due to agriculture. This strikes me as being just a "scapegoat" in favour of shooting (in my opinion) the most helpful and picturesque of English birds.

COLIN GRAY,
Cobham, Surrey.

[Admittedly the green plover consumes the injurious insects you mention, but so do carrion crows, jays, magpies, starlings, etc. "Tower-Bird" suggested shooting the lapwing only during the months of November, December and January when immense migratory flocks visit this country from overseas and should provide first-class sport and a valuable change of diet.—Ed.]

RABBITS IN ESSEX

Sir,—I think readers might be interested to know that Essex is now designated as a proposed Rabbit Clearance Area.

But this is far from being the case at present, for there is one large area (which I will not reveal) where the rabbit still provides sport, and where the dread myxomatosis has not, and I do hope will, never appear. This area literally "stinks" of foxes, but the rabbit is more than holding its own, and can now be seen in greater numbers each year.

M. J. HARDY,
Essex.

SAVE-THE-RABBIT BALLOT

Sir,—The *Essex Chronicle* is holding a secret ballot on the question of whether wild rabbits should be allowed in Essex again. A Rabbit Clearance Order has recently been declared for the whole county. I understand that, after the ballot opened on Friday, October 28, well over a hundred letters and ballot forms had been received by first post Monday morning, showing a 99 per cent vote in favour of the return of rabbits.

May I ask all those of your readers who wish to see an end to the senseless and fanatical campaign now being waged against the rabbit by the Ministry of Agriculture, to write immediately to the Editor, the *Essex Chronicle*, Chelmsford, Essex, simply saying whether they are in favour or not of the return of the rabbit.

If any readers care to collect signatures to "Yes" or "No" on blank sheets of paper, which need only be headed "Do you think wild rabbits should be allowed in Essex again?" so much the better.

Some members of the Essex Wildfowlers' Association have already sent in sheets of paper bearing long lists of signatures. No names and addresses will be published. Votes can be sent in from any county. Some have already arrived from as far away as Cornwall, within 48 hours of the ballot being opened.

It is of the utmost importance that the public should show its views clearly and strongly on this matter. The Minister has made the totally inaccurate and unprovable claim that the rabbit does £50 million pounds worth of damage per year. He has since dropped that claim like a hot coal. Now he says that this year's harvest has benefited by up to £15 million owing to the loss of the rabbit. That claim also is bunkum.

The truth is that rabbits are worth at least £15½ millions per year to this country in hard cash figures, whilst the damage they do is much nearer £4½ million per year than anything else.

If other county newspapers will follow the lead of Essex and conduct rabbit ballots, I am convinced that the overwhelming majority would be in favour of the rabbit.

J. WENTWORTH DAY,
Chairman, Essex Wildfowlers' Association.
Ingatestone, Essex.

The guns at The Kennel Club's Retriever Trials at Sutton Scotney (left to right): Mr. V. Routledge, Mr. F. O. G. Lloyd, Mr. J. Arthur Rank, Mrs. F. Packard, Major C. J. P. Ball, D.S.O., M.C., Major R. F. H. Cowen. See report of trials on page 746 of this issue (and next week).

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING SEASON

Sir,—Having read with interest the correspondence on partridges in your issues of the past few weeks, I feel that I must state my views in relation to this district. Like most other areas we have suffered from three poor seasons. On many shoots there are fewer birds than three years ago, due entirely, I feel, to shooting when the bags should have been severely restricted. There is no doubt that owing to changes in farming methods and lack of keepering it is necessary to leave a bigger stock to shoot the same number of birds.

Many people with small shoots lying between larger estates shoot once a week and expect the ground to "fill in"; and this does not only happen with small shoots. Farmers' syndicates and other large rented shoots are often shot to pieces and take years to recover.

On the whole, the idea of a Rough Shooters' Association seems a good one, but I doubt if those who shoot everything they can would ever join such an association, and so would never learn any better. There is no doubt that it is owing to those kind of shots that partridges never increase in our district.

I feel, however, that changing the opening date to October 1 would help considerably. Many estates in our district have not been shot until October, thus saving the stock.

Our own ground is not very good for partridges, owing to lack of hedges, too much grass on the hilly ground, and too deep ditches on the flat, but through careful shooting and good vermin control we manage to keep as good a stock as can be expected.

PETER A. COX,
Glendoick, Perth.

SHOOTING IN PORTUGUESE MOZAMBIQUE

Sir,—What you said recently about the Portuguese Mozambique Game Laws is true enough in the main. Elephant are an absolute problem, but I heartily dislike hunting them, especially in Southern Africa where (unlike Kenya or the Congo) the ivory runs relatively small.

Buffalo are grand animals in every way (save one). They are rugged, hardy, prolific, carry fine heads, provide *grand* beef, are fascinating to hunt or watch and extremely dangerous if you happen to wound one. Unfortunately, this *Bos Capensis* is the chief animal "vector" of the "game fly" *(morsitans)*, though the fly can easily exist without the buff, and the buff (if any are left) can live on in "cleaned" areas from which the fly has been erradicated.

This buffalo is one of the truly great sporting animals of the world (possibly the greatest?) and sportsmen throughout the world must absolutely insist that it is available at the cheapest rates to anyone able to afford the time and travel. Until recently, it was actually classed as "vermin" in Northern Rhodesia. But no visiting sportsman should want to shoot more than six, at the most.

Hippos are, like whales, really *valuable* animals, but more so dead than alive They used to provide ivory for false teeth, and still provide "oceans" of succulent meat and fat and "pith" about two inches thick under the hide for making whips and curios. Hippos do very well in zoos in South America. The climate seems to suit them even better than Africa. Introduced to the Amazon system they could probably solve the meat problem of the entire Western Hemisphere.

As you rightly, suggest, hippo shooting is not exactly a sport. But it is interesting (like whaling), and it is a matter of quite some nicety to "pierce" the brain of a hippo at a range of 50 yards when the head is half "awash." As you say, it is really a question of control.

I have slept almost cheek by jowl with hippos, and they have done all sorts of things to me short of actually trying to kill me. In October, 1951, I had to fix up the thigh of a native fisherman that a "rogue" hippo had "slashed" down to the bone. Six months later, *in the same place*, a strong herd of hippos actually drove me out of my camp one night, because they did not happen to like the sound or the glare of a hurricane pressure lamp I was using!

The Portuguese let you shoot two hippos on their licence (though I

never shot more than one). The British used to do the same. Today, however, they insist that if you are "troubled" by hippos you must send about three hundred miles away for some little post-war Colonial Official of about 15 months' experience and who, in my opinion, could not hit a haystack (let alone a hippo) at 50 yards!

You are right in mentioning the greater Kudu, but wrong in suggesting that Derby's eland even exists in Mozambique. The position is as follows (so far as I know it): The greater kudu (one of the finest heads in Africa) still ranges literally from the Cape Province to Somalia. The lesser kudu (smaller and without the beard or mane) has a limited distribution in rocky, broken country in Kenya and Tanganyika (I have never seen this animal).

The common eland, to-day almost extinct in many areas, used to cover much of the range of the greater kudu. But Lord Derby's eland (a somewhat larger animal with thicker horns) never has been found outside the Soudan, the Belgian Congo, and French Equatorial Africa.

You are right in hinting that eland provide very little sport (I have never even shot one). They are, however, potentially the most useful domestic animal on earth (especially in the tropics or sub-tropics). They are of very considerable size (a bull may scale 1,500lb.) with excellent meat and plenty of fat. The milk is like that of Alderney cattle. They are immune to most African epizootics, and can live in very parched and waterless country. They are more intelligent and more docile than domestic cattle.

In the 1890s the London Zoological Society tried to popularise "eland beef" as a national dish. The late Colonel ("Teddy") Roosevelt was also interested, but unfortunately nothing came of it. I have always advocated that we of the third generation should try again, especially now that our people have "experimented" with whale and reindeer (eland is superior to either.

I think that shooting ostrich with a rifle might be quite good sport (they are very swift and wary), but they are very rare (or local?) in Mozambique. I saw a wild one only once. They used to swarm in South West Africa.

As for the girraffe, the ancients, wiser in their generation, said that while the unicorn was very rare, the girraffe (or "cameleopard") was almost certainly a myth. I could not agree more. I never saw one wild anywhere in South Eastern Africa—only when I went to Kenya, and I still do not believe it. If you see a girraffe when you are out hunting just look the other way (or take more water with it), I always do. Not only does it not exist, but from the white man's point of view there is absolutely no reason (save leather thongs) why it should exist. What conceivable purpose can it have—good or bad?

The flesh of the girraffe is said to be too rank for European consumption. But natives poach the animal in preference to all others whenever they can get away with it, because it is large, conspicuous, and almost defenseless.

Well, if some *must* be killed anyway why not sell them for foreign currency? To be quite fair to our Portuguese allies, this is the system followed by the Tanganyika Government since their Game Laws were "reformed" in 1950 (in which, by the way, I played a humble part). I think the Portuguese merely copied the idea from us. For surely the "Ingleses" should know? So blame it on *me* if you like, if that will save the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance. *My* shoulders are as broad as Atlas's . . .

Now, I fear you will not be able to publish all this. But you brought it on yourselves by mentioning *so many* fascinating animals. For you must admit they *are* fascinating? Further, the matter is highly topical, and if you can give us any space (or start a correspondence) it will coincide nicely with Mr. Cowie's visit and lecture tour in this country.

Let us all get together and proclaim a New Charter (or New Deal) for African animals . . .

Wake up! "Le jour du Gloire est arrivé!"

E. MUSPRATT,
Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

SHOOTING OVER SETTERS

Sir,—Rule 7 seems to annoy Mr. Jones very much, but all these rules were talked over and voted on. If it was not required, it certainly would not have been accepted.

Now, I can tell Mr. Jones that at field trials in both England as well as Wales, I have myself seen dogs that failed to move up freely. To give a case in point, a bitch of mine during her first season was always difficult to make move up freely. I did not cast her as no good, she won a 2nd in Novice, a 3rd in Open in which one of my own dogs was 2nd, and co-winner in a good many brace stakes.

Any trainer who threw out a young dog for this fault in the early stages would not know his job. I fancy most trainers would agree with me. I should much like to hear Mr. Moxon's views on this.

A. H. VERSCHOYLE,
Athy, Co. Kildare.

ARE GERMAN S.H. POINTERS SWIMMERS?

Sir,—Having been a regular reader of *The Shooting Times* for more than ten years, and also a member of the G.S.P.C., and a gamekeeper who has given up spaniels and retrievers for German short-haired pointers, I would like to reply to Dugald Macintyre as follows:

(1) That German short-haired pointers are very good water retrievers indeed, and I, myself, having had one for five years have not, at the time of writing, lost a thing in water with her. Also, this year up to date I have lost only one partridge which was a runner in kale.

I can assure Dugald Macintyre that the German pointer is a first-class water retriever, and this year, and during the last three years at the G.S.P.R. Trials I have not yet seen one fail on the water retrieve.

(2) Please let us hear no more of this hard-mouth in the breed, as I have seen it in labradors and spaniels.

R. N. BUSHELL,
Nr. Reading, Berks.

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Gun Gossip

by North Country

ONE shooting man who regrets the temporary passing of the rabbit from the English scene is my Turkish friend who has never had much rabbit shooting. He says he is very keen on rabbits, but he could never get on terms with them in the manner he would have liked. His total so far is under fifty head—his best day 17. "So I always want to get a lot of practice in England, especially as we hardly have any here."

My friend has been enjoying some very good dove shooting on an estate near the great Government stud in Anatobia. The party stayed in tents—"a most refreshing form of life for a short space of time." He had 152 one day and during the seven days' shooting it blew at gale strength and the shooting over high trees was most difficult and sporting. Of another visit he writes: "I chose the wrong spots, was misled by bad advice from peasants who reported wonderful passages in the far distance, which proved illusory, and hot and bothered with time running out, I started to shoot badly too. I decided to return, cross like a bear, and then we came across birds and I returned with 107 doves at noon."

The Scorched Glove

After lunch my friend chose a wonderful spot, standing in a patch of uncut corn. The wind had risen to full gale strength and the birds were being blown about in bewildering fashion. They started sheering round him from all over the compass, some low battling against the wind, others flying with it. It was load, fire, load, fire, for an hour and twenty minutes. He says: "How I was grateful in having an o. and u. instead of an ordinary gun, because my left-hand would have been burnt to a cinder otherwise. Even with the o. and u. the fore-end got so hot that it scorched my gloved left hand and I missed several birds by an involuntary flinch. At last I was so tired, winded and satisfied that I stopped and started the pick-up. We gathered 138 doves in that space of time, and I really learnt a lot about connecting with these targets that I find harder in those conditions that most other birds." Another 38 were shot in the evening, making a total of 273.

He says that he thinks these big days, if not easy ones, ram down a lot of knowledge in shooting that would otherwise take ages to acquire. I quite agree and I feel that the full value of big days is too often under-estimated. It has become rather the fashion to "write off" big days. But as my friend says, the shooting must not be easy.

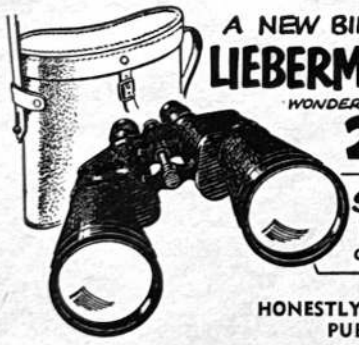
Now a few words about cartridges and loads. My friend says that he has managed, at long last, to find a good 3in. load with Turkish powder, used Super X cases, English felt wads and Turkish shot (almost a United Nations effort). "We have become quite expert now in reloading used cartridges," he writes. He tested these loads on duck — fired at a high mallard at an estimated range of 50 yards. It came down and swam away, the boatman chased it for a long time and killed it at last with his oar. He writes: "I thought I had been behind it, so had it plucked and was astonished to see it had been hit in the beak, two pellets in the breast near the neck, two pellets in the tummy, one wing broken and the other hit. Thinking my cartridge had not penetration enough, I turned it over and found three pellets had gone right through. The shot I was using ran 162 pellets to the ounce. I still cannot imagine how that duck survived." Neither can I, seeing that a pellet size roughly equivalent to our No. 4 was used.

Some days later my friend had a right and left, or rather an over and under, at red crested pochard. The first bird fell wing broken and was finished on the water, the other carried on and came down in front and was picked up dead. The range was about 45 yards. On examination six pellet marks were found ranging from two in the neck to four in the body —most of which had gone right through. Yet, instead of crumpling up in the air and describing a graceful arc and a spectacular splash, it carried on for a hundred yards!

It is difficult to offer an explanation in those cases beyond saying that, as in humans, the degree of vitality in different birds varies. Some clearly can take more than others. All the same this does not in any way cover the present matter—which goes to show that our aim may not always be so much at fault as we may be led to imagine!

Mr. Leonard Pearce, a director of Holland and Holland, the Bond Street gunsmiths, has been appointed Master of the Worshipful Company of Gunmakers for the coming year. Major Victor Seely, a director of James Purdey and Sons, is the new Upper Warden, and Sir Percy Mills, the Birmingham industrialist, is Renter Warden.

Under the water of the River Dee near Balmoral Castle there is a mark that records the lowest level ever reached by the river. It was chipped there this summer out of a slanting stone by the Queen's factor, Major Andrew Haig. The stone slopes down to the boat pool, a favourite salmon fishing spot for the Queen and Prince Philip. There are three earlier marks on the stone, the lowest dated 1913. But Major Haig's mark is one inch lower.



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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

THE monstrous suggestion (needless to say instigated by the show bench fraternity) that the qualifying certificate for gundog champions should be done away with is occupying the minds of all of us who have the best interests of the gundog breeds at heart. For the benefit of many shooting men who are not aware of the regulations; the rule is at present that no gundog can become a champion on the bench (no matter how many challenge certificates it may win) without being granted the qualifying certificate in the field. Three challenge certificates (granted by different judges) plus the qualifying certificate to enable a dog to assume the coveted title.

The important qualifier is given at a field trial for the breed concerned. For instance, in the case of retrievers the dog must demonstrate that it is not gunshy and will retrieve tenderly. For spaniels the same applies but it must also face cover and show a hunting instinct, whereas with bird dogs it is necessary for the animal to acknowledge game in the approved manner besides being unfraid of the gun. Not very much to ask, surely? The dogs do not have to be steady or to exhibit any of the refinements of training which shooting men demand. All they have to prove is that they have got the necessary instincts of the breed they represent and are unfraid of the gun.

We all know the havoc wreaked upon the working, gundog breeds (and others) by the show people. They have bred for "beauty" and conformation rather than for brains and working ability, with the result that many of the leading show dogs in various breeds have had their working instinct practically bred out of them. Of late, lots of owners have found it difficult (and in many cases impossible) to obtain the qualifying certificate for their dogs, the field trial judges who have been testing them very rightly refusing to grant certificates where they have been incapable of being earned.

After all, the idea of the qualifying certificate was originally to guarantee (as far as is possible) that the "top dogs" in the gundog breeds are still capable of being trained and worked, and that the essential qualities of a gundog should not be lost. That the dogs which became champions of their breeds (and would naturally be used at stud a great deal) should not lower and cause a deterioration in standard as far as working ability was concerned. The originators of the qualifier had the interests of the gundog breeds at heart, and they probably aimed (as many do today) to produce brains as well as beauty.

All-Important Working Qualities

What has happened over the intervening years? Show people—and here I mean show people pure and simple—have produced the dogs so far as looks and breed standards go, but they have failed lamentably to keep going the all-important working qualities of their dogs. Many have never bothered to train their dogs to the gun in any degree unless and until they have been awarded challenge certificates on the bench, and then they only did so to ensure that the qualifier should be granted. Not, mark you, because they had any interest in keeping the working attributes of their breed alive and active, but simply because they wanted to be able to place the title "champion" before the name of their dogs, not only for the glory of it but for the financial gain that would assuredly accrue.

Messrs. J. Chudley, K. Chudley and A. Wylie at the Kennel Club's Open Stake at Sutton Scotney.

Combining Beauty and Utility

All tribute to the kennels—though few in number—which have valiantly strived over these years to combine beauty and utility, and which had a genuine interest in the working ability of their dogs. The fact that they have not been over successful in either sphere—show or field—is simply because the standard of training demanded to win at trials seems somehow incompatible with the standards of "beauty" demanded by the show people. One can count on one hand the number of Dual Champions produced since the war. There have, I believe, been two labradors to achieve the honour, but there have been no springers or cockers and, as far as I am aware, no bird-dogs at all. Golden retrievers have produced either one or two dual champions, and here the list ends. A sorry state of affairs indeed.

It would be unfair not to give the other side of the picture. Whatever faults I may possess (and they are many), I do, where dogs are concerned, endeavour to see the other man's point of view. The show people say, in effect, that training and the obtaining of qualifiers is both expensive and difficult and that, after all, why should they go to this trouble and expense unless the field trial enthusiasts breed up to a standard and try to produce good lookers as well as good workers? They have suggested that before a dog is able to assume the title F.T. Champion it should qualify at a show, in order that the type and conformation of the breed should be in evidence in a dog which would, obviously, be widely used for breeding purposes. They state, and not without a great deal of justification, that many trial dogs do not conform to the standards laid down by the breed societies. They are now pressing for the abolition of the qualifying certificate, but hint that if their "show qualifier" suggestion is accepted by the trial enthusiasts, there may be a change of view.

Approaching Show-Down

This controversy—show gundogs versus working gundogs—has been going on for years, and has frequently been aired in *The Shooting Times*. We are rapidly approaching a climax and a show-down, and if the breed societies—or some of them, at any rate—have their way, and opposition is not strong enough, the qualifier for showdogs will be on its way out. All interested societies have been circularised by the governing body of dogdom—the Kennel Club—and asked to give their opinions in this matter, and there are doubtless many people who are still undecided and "sitting on the fence."

The fact cannot be ignored that whereas some of the breed societies are just as interested in the working side of their dogs as in the show side, many clubs and societies are—more is the pity—now merely show fraternities which would be only too glad to see the qualifier abolished. They would thereby be able to make their dogs show champions much more easily and cheaply. At the present time there must be scores of "gundogs" (in name only) which have obtained the necessary challenge certificates on the bench, but are still unable to obtain the field qualifier to be entitled "Champions."

To the mere onlooker, the contention that a field dog should qualify on the bench in the same way that a bench dog must qualify in the field before obtaining its title may seem fair

The winner of the Kennel Club's Open Stake at Sutton Scotney—Mr. F. George's labrador Harpersbrook Poacher with his handler, Mr. J. Chudley.

and just. However, we must remember the all important factor that gundogs are supposed to *be* gundogs, not merely beautiful specimens of a breed. They serve a definite and useful purpose in life and, furthermore, were it not for the support of the man who wants shooting dogs *for work*, many of the breeds would suffer from the popularity point of view. I maintain that first things should come first, and that a *gundog* is a working dog first and a show dog second.

If dog "fanciers" (how I hate that word!) must devote their attentions to gundogs, is it asking too much that they should ensure that the most essential qualities of all—working ability—is retained? After all, a man can shoot over a dog with pleasure providing it can do its proper job in an efficient manner, and most shooters do not care so much what the dog looks like, so long as it is fairly representative of the breed to which it belongs. On the other hand, the man who simply wants to show dogs, and to possess beautiful dogs, can take his pick from countless non-working breeds and do what he likes with them, without in any way interfering with their utility. For many years, in several gundog breeds, there has been evidence of two separate types of dog—the show and the working types. Many of the show dogs cannot work, and the working types (in many cases) would not show. Unless this regrettable disparity in type is to become even greater and more pronounced, something must be done, and done quickly. But I do not think the abolition of the qualifier is the way to go about it.

After all, if the show people expect the working gundog enthusiast to alter his standards, why should they not meet us and alter their standards a little? First things first, and in a gundog there can be no question but that *working ability should be the first consideration.* I hope that all interested readers will do all in their power to oppose the abolition of the qualifier and thus ensure that the appalling lack of working ability in most show dogs is not allowed to become even more pronounced than it already is. How about the Kennel Club organising a special qualifier stake for each breed each season? This might solve a lot of problems.

Testing Dogs at Drives

Several readers have raised the subject of testing dogs at drives during retriever trials. The argument seems to be that a retriever ought to be tested both on game driven over the guns, as well as that walked-up with the dogs at heel in the line. Many trials for retrievers are held in the eastern counties, and the Winchester area, when nothing other than walking-up in line is done. On the other hand, a lot of trials in Kent and the midlands are held on wooded estates where all the shooting is of driven game. It is the exceptional trial where dogs are able to be tested at both walking-up and driven game. This is a great pity, but it often cannot be helped. The shooting has to be of the type required by the donors of the ground, and according to the ground.

Apart from this, I think that retrievers are probably more thoroughly tested whilst walking-up than they are at drives, but for all that there are possibly many dogs which would not stand up to both types of shooting. For instance, a whiner would soon be out of a stake where the game was driven over the guns, but it would not be discovered where the game is walked up. A dog which is steady at a drive might easily succumb to temptation whilst walking up—and *vice versa.* However, I take consolation from the fact that few of our best dogs would go far wrong at either type of trial, and, of course, it must always be remembered that luck plays a very great part in any trial. We have all been grateful for this fact at some time or another — I most certainly have!

A reader signing himself "Wildfowling Vet." (Sussex), asks me about my enthusiasm for herbal treatments and medicines. I am quite accustomed to having gentlemen of his profession (and also of the medical profession) "getting at me" on this topic. I can explain my enthusiasm quite simply. In my case, the "proof of the pudding" has definitely been in the eating. I have found the distemper treatment (as advocated by Miss de Bairacli-Levy) to be most effective, and I now seldom lose a dog with distemper, whereas under "orthodox" treatment it was nothing unusual to lose quite 25 to 50 per cent of the patients under a year old.

I have no fears of distemper if I can catch it early, and treat it with fasting and the rest. The secret of success with this method lies, I believe, in completely *fasting the dog all the time there is any fever present.* The dosing

Mr. J. Arthur Rank, with his loader, Mr. W. Brown, at the Kennel Club's Open Stake at Sutton Scotney.

with garlic may possibly be quite secondary. I may be wrong—I possibly am—but I believe "hard pad" to be a very severe form of distemper, one which does not develop where the dog is caught early and treated properly. I have never known a dog to have hard pad if it has previously had distemper proper. I also believe that vets are very prone to label as "hard pad" any fever ailment which they cannot accurately diagnose.

How does a veterinary surgeon diagnose hard pad, or differentiate between that and distemper, except where the pads harden and the brain becomes affected? I would like to know. I hope to hear further from "Wildfowling Vet.," and I will return to the subject in a future article.

Field Trial Year Book

The Kennel Club Field Trial Year Book for 1954-55 is on sale from 84 Piccadilly, London, W.1, price seven shillings and sixpence. This is a most valuable and well-produced book of trial records for that season, containing 108 pages packed with information of great value to every trial enthusiast. The contents include K.C. Field Trial Rules and Regulations, Regulations for the F.T. Council, F.T. Council recommendations approved by the F.T. Committee, Gundog Registrations for 1954, Official List of Judges, List of F.T. Champions from 1946 to date, list of Field Trials 1954-55, and records of Field Trials for the same season. It has been made abundantly clear that unless this issue of the Year Book sells in sufficient quantity there will be no further issues, and this would be a great pity.

Field Trials

The North Western Counties Field Trials Association's field trials for retrievers were held at Lowther Castle, Penrith, Cumberland, by kind invitation of The Right Hon. The Earl of Lonsdale. This ground, as in the past, held plenty of winged game and hares, together with mallard and teal, and the trials were completed in a most satisfactory manner to the evident enjoyment of all present. The shooting was of the highest order. Mr. Donald Wilson (headkeeper) was steward of the beat, and he, together with his staff of under-keepers, worked extremely hard to make the trials the success they undoubtedly were. The three judges—Messrs. John Forbes, George Curle and Graham Blacklock—carried out their job to the satisfaction of all parties concerned and dealt with numerous "tricky" items of dog work in their usual efficient and courteous manner.

The weather on the first day was fine with a cold wind, and on the second day it was fine to almost the end of the trials when a very heavy rainstorm soaked everyone both in and out of the line, but disregarding this, the guns dealt with a good covey or two of partridges, which enable the judges to make their final decisions. The dog work throughout was very good and some excellent performances were seen.

Awards. First: Major Hugh Peacock's labrador Greatford Seal, capably handled by Jack Chudley; ran a very fine trial making a good retrieve of a hare and later a good pheasant, finishing up the end of the stake by wiping the eye of two dogs on a dead pheasant which had fallen into the river. Second: Major Blackett's labrador Corbridge Juliana, handled by her owner, wiped the eye of a dog on a long runner partridge and later marked a long pheasant extremely well and which she retrieved in good style. Third: Mr. Tom Laird's labrador Criffol Judy, tried hard on a hare which had gone a long way out into a wood. She made the best retrieve of the day on a runner pheasant in the turnips and although she failed later on a hen pheasant across the river, her work on the long runners put her in the awards. Reserve: Mr. Frank Bell's labrador Peteradee made a good find of a partridge and wiped the eye of another dog on an open pasture. He later wiped the eye of a dog on a pheasant in the river but failed on a dead pheasant in roots and a further dead pheasant in the river.

Certificates of Merit were awarded as follows: Mr. F. K. Atkinson's labrador Avenham Dictator made a good job of a hare and also a partridge; Mr. R. N. Burton's labrador F.T.Ch. Brackenbank Merry made a good retrieve of a wounded teal, he was under perfect control of his owner and very stylish, but this was not his lucky day; Mrs. P. Eccles's golden retriever Haulstone Yenston Brock made a good job of two hares and retrieve of a pheasant across the river after other dog had failed.

Non-Winners' Stake: 1, Mr. W. Wright's labrador Foresthill Jimmy; 2, Col. Kingsford-Lethbride's labrador Creedypark Slipper; 3, Mr. E. Dawson's labrador High Angerton Shot; reserve, Mr. J. G. Watts' labrador Lutra of Owthorpe. All owner handled. One award of honour and four certificates of merit were awarded.

* * *

The Kennel Club held its Open Stake for Retrievers on the Sutton Scotney Estate, by kind invitation of Mr. J. Arthur Rank, on November 4 and 5. Weather, organisation, shooting and game situation were all excellent, and some most interesting dog work was seen. The judges were the hon. Lady Hill Wood, Major D. Blackett and Mr. John Forbes. *A more detailed report will appear in the next issue.*

Awards: 1, Mr. F. George's labrador dog Harpersbrook Poacher (J. Chudley); 2, Mr. R. N. Burton's labrador F.T.Ch. Brackenbank Merry; 3, Major H. Peacock's labrador F.T.Ch. Greatford Teal; 4, Mr. J. Arthur Rank's labrador Scotney Dusty (A. K. Manners); reserve, Mr. J. Arthur Rank's and Mr. V. Routledge's labrador Red Robe (W. C. Brunt). Certificates of merit to Mr. W. Lawrence Taylor's labrador Galleywood Buzz (R. Male), and Mrs. Crawshay's labrador Nazeing Soot.

ON THE GAME FARM

by Joyce Eltringham

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare . . .
—W. H. DAVIES.

INDEED, with the ever-increasing speed of life, we certainly do have little time to stand and stare; but, as I have said before, this is the time of year on the game farm when we *do stop*, look round, and take stock of things, and very often a walk round the farm, with notebook and pencil handy, will result in quite a formidable list of things that need attention.

All the movable laying pens and covered avairies must be checked over carefully—a slat renewed here, a new catch fixed on one of the gates there; the wire-netting round the water pens should, of course, be in good order, for the birds are running in the pens now, and it is as well to see that a strong wind or persistent rain has not loosened any of the stakes and thus slackened the netting. Quite often, during the process of clearing up after the summer, an odd roll of wire-netting may be inadvertently left in the corner of a field and forgotten; or we come across a pile of water troughs in the now disused broody pen.

Minor Repairs

The wooden feeding sheeds, which stand at various vantage points on our land, may need repairing in some small way. Possibly a rat will have gnawed a hole in the floor, or a pane of glass may be cracked; bundles of faggots, removed from the laying pens, in which they provided shelter for the birds, have been dumped outside the pens. They must not be allowed to remain there long, otherwise they will soon provide wonderful winter quarters for rats. Some of the nesting boxes, stacked ready for next season, may need some small repairs, likewise the movable rearing pens, to say nothing of the farm buildings themselves.

Quite apart from anything else, everything

Turning birds into the winter pens.

on the farm, in the sheds and in the office, must be in "apple pie order" by the end of October (at which time I am writing these notes), for that is when we hold our annual valuation—when every item on the farm be accounted for, from the pheasants themselves to the egg boxes, baskets and hampers; from the office equipment down—almost—to the last nail in the carpenter's shed.

Results of Myxomatosis

Since the introduction into this country of myxamatosis, gamefarmers and owners of shoots and estates have been fighting an unprecedented battle against vermin of all kinds, especially the buzzard, which, having been deprived of its staple food, the rabbit, is proving particularly destructive to game birds. Fortunately for us, buzzards do not much frequent our part of England. But a customer of ours in North Devon has suffered extremely heavy losses as a result of buzzards, both of hand-reared pheasants turned into the coverts and of wild pheasants. Indeed, so great were his losses of young birds, that he asked if we could let him have some late poults, as replacements, which we did; they were about fifteen weeks old.

No sooner had they been turned out than the keeper saw, with his own eyes, a buzzard swoop down and kill one of the cock birds, clean it completely of every ounce of flesh, and fly off. Just for proof of this story, the keeper sent us, by post, the perfect skeleton of the young pheasant—an unusual parcel, to be sure, and although on occasions we have received perhaps a dead chick for examination, or a few eggs which did not hatch, I do not think a skeleton has ever come our way before. Of course, the buzzard being a protected bird, we have no redress—we can only look on—and think (a little sorely perhaps) that the farmer *could* shoot his rabbits!

Incidentally, the damage by vermin to the pheasant stock on estates and shoots may account for the rather unusual demand we had at the end of October for late pheasant poults.

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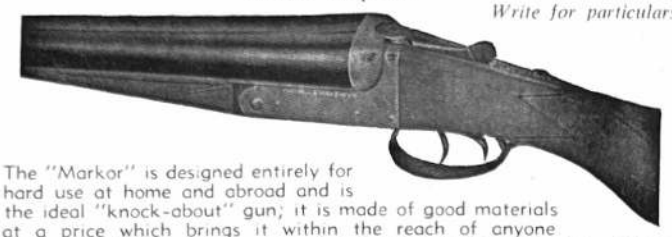

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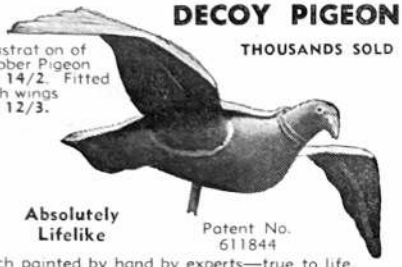

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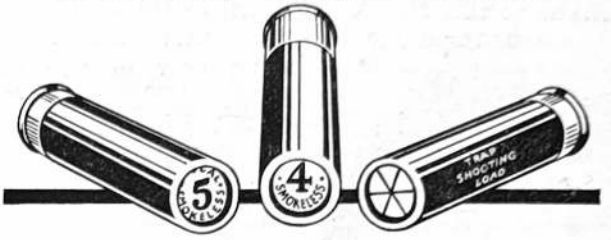

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